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UNCLAS MONTREAL 000550

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAN, IIP, INR/IAA

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SUBJECT: Montreal Jewish School Firebombed on Passover

Ref: Toronto 000564

1. A private Jewish school in Montreal's St. Laurent neighborhood was firebombed in the early morning hours of April 5, the first day of the Passover holiday. The firebombing took place between 2.a.m. and 3 a.m. in the library of the United Talmud Torah St. Laurent School on de l'Eglise Street. There were no casualties.

2. Inspector Yves Surprenant, of the Montreal Police Department, was quoted in media accounts as saying that, "What was written on the paper stuck to the door has made us believe it was a hate crime" but the police would not confirm media accounts that the note, written in French, made reference to recent attacks against Palestinians including the killing of Sheik Ahmed Yassin in Gaza.

3. Local and federal politicians, including the Prime Minister, were quick to condemn the incident, and a rally was held outside the school yesterday, attended by Montreal Mayor Gerald Tremblay, Federal Justice Minister Irwin Cotler, and leaders of the Montreal Jewish Community. Cotler, a graduate of the school and a noted human rights lawyer, was reported to have told the rally, "Yes, as students we received anti-Semitism, but it was the anti-Semitism of ignorance, of stereotyping, of prejudice. What we have witnessed here today is the anti-Semitism of hate and of racism."

4. Quebec Premier Jean Charest released a statement as well, noting, "Setting fire to a school is already a vile act, since it touches the future of our society. But when it is done in the name of racism and intolerance, every Quebecer must stand up to denounce it so that it never happens again." The president of the Canadian Islamic Conference, for his part, is quoted as saying that the "agony will be double if the fire was committed by a Muslim."

5. Security surveillance of Jewish institutions in Montreal will be stepped up, and as will that of Muslim mosques, "in case of any counter-acts," according to a Montreal police spokeswoman.

6. This act comes just a few weeks after a series of anti-Semitic vandalism incidents occurred in the greater Toronto area (reftel). Federal and local leaders, as they did in Montreal, loudly condemned the crimes committed in Toronto. In addition, the Toronto police service has announced the arrest of three individuals in connection with the vandalism. Taken together, however, these two high-profile events bolster statistics recently released by B'nai Brith that suggest that anti-semitic incidents are on the rise in Canada.

7. The Consulate left messages of sympathy with the Quebec offices of the Canadian Jewish Congress and the B'Nai Brith Canada; both organizations were apparently closed for the Passover holiday.

8. This cable includes input from Embassy Ottawa.
BALLEN